

Kentucky Marker Papers

Primary – Grade 12

~ without Annotations ~



Kentucky Department
of Education

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Gene Wilhoit, Commissioner
Kentucky Department of Education

SHORT STORIES



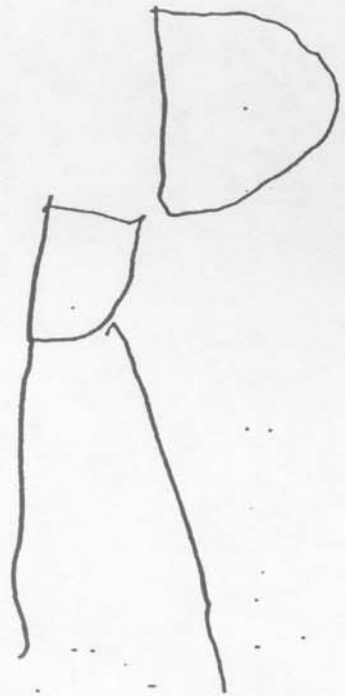
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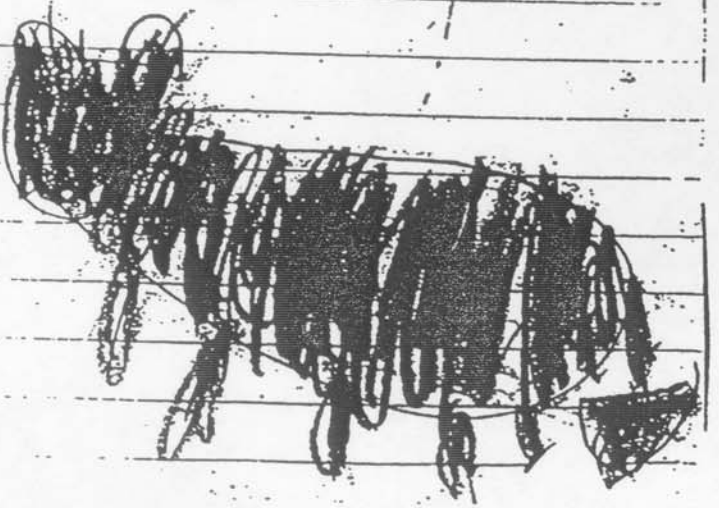
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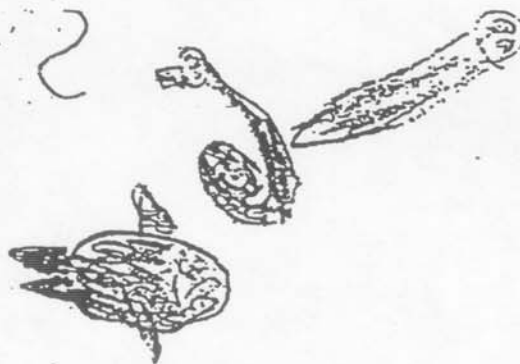
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BY TYLER
DAYS WITH
RANE.

TITLE PAGE



IT WAS
A SUNNY
DAY.



IT CAME
A BIG #
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IT LITING.

pg. 2



IT WAS-
ASUNNY DAY
BUT IT
PLAINE TA-BIG
RANE.

pg. 3

The tentai

ONE DAY I WAS PLAYING IN A CREEK,



AND I SAW A TENTAI NEWUS,
EATING A COFISH



I went home and got sum'gins.



and I went back to the creek.



Was the tetra still there?
Was the crofish still here?



The tetra was still there
but the crofish were not
The crofish was in the
tetra's swim.



Lost Their Voice

X One cold snowy day a lion and
A monkey and a horse and a City,
Dulka and a fish. They lose
Their voice watching a parade
Cheering at the parade,
They went back home
and ate chicken, noodle,
Soup and drank lemon tea,
and went to bed. The next
morning they get their
voice back.

The End

The Dog Saw The Day
One day Katie found a dog
in her back yard! She played with it.
Then the next day dad took
him away! Katie cried so
hard that she disappeared!
When dad got home he didn't
see her! He could find her but

they coont find her! Sodad
got the dog! It fawnd her
Dad let her hav the wun-dr-ful
dog! She had billyins uv fun

little Elephant's Bad day
One day little elephant
was at school. He had
tests all day and did not
get any reeses. When he
got home his mom was
not there and she did not
leave him a popcicle to eat.
When she got home

she was tired. Little elephant
mother was very pretty. She
had beautiful ears that always
stood up and she always had
beautiful ^{makeup} with lots of colors
and she was always smiling.
But right then little elephants
mother ears were down. Her

make up was smeared all over
her face. They had left
overs for supper. Then
she told little elephant to
go to take a bath she said
be sure to wash behind your
ears. After that brush your
tusk. then get to bed.

The next day was - Saturday
little elephant got up early
trying not to wake up
mother. Little elephant thought
since I'm up why don't
I make mother breakfast
in bed. little elephant
said I will fix mother

ceared and toast. So as
little elephant went to get
a bowl they went bang bang
pong. But the he got some cereal
and milk. He pored it together
in the bowl and put some toast
on the toaster and brought it
to mother. Soon it was no
longer a bad day.

Sarah's Favorite Christmas

Long ago there was a little girl named Sarah Smith who was nine years old. She knew that in a couple of weeks it would be her favorite holiday, Christmas. She thought that the best part of Christmas was the beautiful Christmas lights. She liked the blue ones the most. This Christmas was going to be the best she had ever had. Well, she hoped it would be.

The next morning Sarah went to school in the cold snow. Once she was in the schoolhouse she was as warm as she could be. When the lesson was started Sarah had her mind on the Christmas turkey. She was thinking about the wonderful smell of the delicious turkey. And when her teacher called on her to answer a question she answered the question with a simple reply "good turkey". All the children laughed at her.

On the way home a young boy knocked her down on the cold snow. She was so angry. When she had arrived home her mother was putting up the Christmas tree.

Once a week had passed she seemed more excited than ever.

Her present was the first present under the tree. Until her father brought her mother's present in.

It was Christmas Day. So Sarah ran down stairs to see what Santa had brought her. In her stocking was a candy cane , a plum and a cute little doll. And she got to open the present under the Christmas tree. This really was the best Christmas she had ever had!

Lost in the Future

Once upon a time my brother and I found a machine in a dump. It was snaking and it weird. we saw a button and it said something on it. My brother just wiped it and I just pushed his hand.

The machine just started. It also sounded weird, my brother and I started turning a purple color. Then, all of the sudden we saw a black and purple hairy thing. We went in a market and there was a purple and pink hairy monsters. It looked like there were little people under the tables.

I asked a monster "What year it was and what state we were in." The monster said, "Its year 2010 and your in Florida." My brother and I said, together "COOL!" Then, we said, "Can we stay here? The monster said, "I don't care."

Then, we saw our mom and dad come. They said, "Where are we?" We said, "Your in Florida, and the year is 2010." They said, "COOL! CAN WE STAY?" We said, "Can we stay?" They said, "You can stay."

So we stayed they, a few days later I woke up, and looked in the mirror. I was a purple and pink hairy thing! So was mom, dad, and brother. I woke them up. We said, "Lets build a time machine and get out of here and get back to the year 1999 and the state Kentucky."

We found metal and a steering wheel. My brother and dad built the time machine. My mom and I got our clothes, and stuff like that. We got in the time machine. My dad forgot to make a key, we waited. My dad finally got the key made. He started it, and we all turned a purple color. It started shaking again, we saw a peson. It was my brother's friend with my friend. They were happy to see us. My brother and I made a decsion. We decided to never touch buttons that we didn't know what they did.

How the Scared Scarecrow Was Scared!

Once there was a scarecrow. The scarecrow had a problem. He was scared. He was scared of crows. Every time he saw a crow he yelled, "Help, help!" The next day a snake came by. Just then a crow was about to land on the scarecrow. The scared scarecrow looked up. The crow landed right on the scared scarecrow. You know what the

Scarecrow did. He yelled, "Help! Help!"
He began to cry. And the crow left.
The snake said, "Why are you
scared of a crow? If you are a
crow, then you shall not be scared.
That is why you are called a
scarecrow." But how can I not be
scared?" said the scarecrow. "All the
crows are just crows. When you see
a crow just look like you are a

statue and then when the crow
comes on you, make a loud noise
that will scare the crows. So that
is what the scared scarecrow did.
From now on the scared
scarecrow was no longer called
the scared scarecrow.

A Shot

Joe was outside with his mom. It was a cold clear night as it always was in Colorado. Joe's dad had gone on a business trip.

"Just yesterday it seemed a lot warmer," said Joe's mom. Joe had brown hair and, brown eyes just like his mother. Joe was feeling kind of cold so he asked.

"Can we go home now?"

"Sure," replied Joe's mom.

When they got home Joe went up to his room. His room had colorful wallpaper and, a goldfish tank at the end of it. Joe's mom called Joe to dinner. Joe's face was pale and, he was cold.

"Are you okay?" asked Joe's mom.

"Yes," replied Joe.

They ate dinner quietly. Then Joe went upstairs, brushed his teeth and went to bed. It took Joe a long time to fall asleep.

The next day when Joe woke up and, he wasn't feeling very good. He thought that he'd better tell his mom. He went downstairs and, told his mom. When Joe's mom heard this she sighed.

"I go make an appointment with the doctor, but for

now go back to bed."

Joe suddenly remembered when he was four years old. He had the fever and, he went to the doctor. The doctor told him he was going to give him a shot. The doctor had to hold him down and then the doctor came in with a needle. It had hurt so much he fell off the table he was sitting on. The next thing Joe knew his mom was calling him to go to the doctor. Joe was tired and, felt sick but he didn't want to go to the doctor.

Joe's mom drove Joe to the doctor. The thirty minute drive seemed like hours to Joe. When they arrived at the doctor he went straight to the doctors office. The doctor checked Joe everywhere.

"You have a sore throat," he said. "I'll have to give you a shot."

The doctor went out of the room and came back with a needle.

"It'll only take a second," he said.

Just like when I was four he thought. He waited for the pain but, felt nothing.

"It's over!" the doctor said.

"Good," replied Joe.

Joe felt dizzy so he decided to sleep. He slept all the way home. When Joe saw his mom in front of him. He

told her about the shot and, he said. "I'll go to bed early."

"Without dinner?" she asked.

"Yeah, I'm not real hungry," and, with that he went to bed.

The next day he was feeling good again. He told his mom.

"Maybe because of the shot," she said.

"Maybe," Joe replied.

Turkey Disguise

It was the day before Thanksgiving. I was walking in the woods, when all of a sudden a shot hit 3 of my feathers off. I started running and I ran right into a garbage can. There was a banana peel and a lot of egg shells I was on something soft in the pizza box. I was still for awhile, until someone passed the garbage can saying "where did that turkey go?" I gulped softly.

When a couple of minutes passed, I got up and pushed the garbage can over. The sunlight shown on a hat and a worn out stuffed teddy bear inside the pizza box that I was in.

I ran to my best friend's house. "Hi Broc", I said. "Hi Gobble", said Broc. "Broc, I almost got killed today!" "How?" asked Broc. "This guy came out from behind a tree and shot off three of my feathers!"

Why don't you get a disguise.

A disguise! That's it!", Thanks buddy! Got to leave, bye.

I ran back to the garbage can and pulled out the stuffed bear, there was a piece of gum on one of the teddy bear's claw. I pulled off the piece of gum. I pulled out the hat, a banana peel was in it, so I took it out. I zipped the bear open and took all the stuffing out. I then put on the worn out bear suit. I put on the hat, I walked over and got a stick for a cane.

I wanted to see if it worked.
So I walked past a farmer.
The farmer said "Hi kid, Halloween
is over!" Then he passed me. I
laughed with excitement and I was
thrilled.

I ran home and my parents
did not recognize me. So I showed
that it was me and I told them
what happened.

Then I called Broc. I
told him what I found and we
invited Broc and his parents
to Thanksgiving dinner. We
were so thankful that the
farmers didn't get us this
year.

Showdown Sam



A long time ago back when the west was wild, there lived a mean buckaroo by the name of Showdown Sam. Sam constantly bragged about how he was the fastest draw on this side of the Mississippi. He even offered to challenge anyone who doubted his opinion. But no one did, because he was the **best draw** on this side of the Mississippi.

One day while Sam was sitting at the local saloon drinking a round of milk, he was startled by a large noise from outside. He walked across the creaky floorboards and through the swinging saloon doors to the dusty roads that lie in front of the dry building. There he saw a kid. He couldn't be too old.

He yelled, "Hey kid, what's the name!"



"The name's, Kid, Cody the Kid. I'm looking for an old guy. Sam is his name. He claims to be the quickest draw this side of the Mississippi," replied the kid.

With this reply, Sam could feel his anger build, and told him his name. "You're looking at him boy," screamed Sam.

The kid then challenged Sam to a draw that afternoon at the town square. Sam excepted and went off to sharpen his pencil.



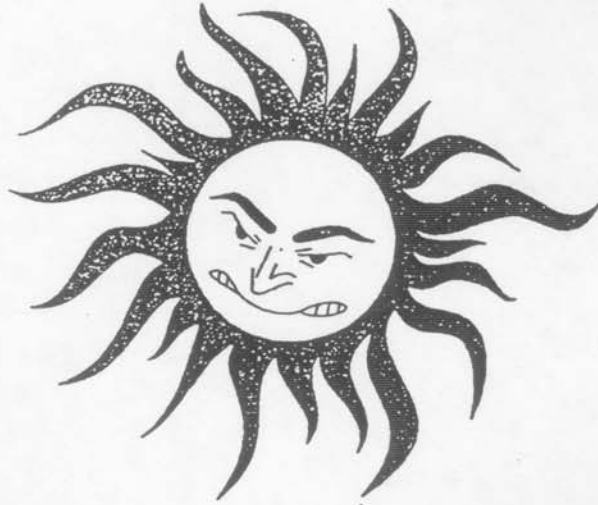
Later that evening, Sam and Cody met right at the dead center of the town. People were gathered around to witness the event.

"We'll start when the clock strikes six," Sam told Cody.

As soon as the clock struck, dust was all anyone could see for at least five minutes. When the dust cleared, there stood both of the men with their drawings. The crowd was awed by Sam's portrait of a cowgirl on a horse, however, they marveled at Cody's cowboy riding a bull in a rodeo.



With applause, it was evident that Cody had won the contest. From that day on the west knew a new name, the name of Kid, Cody the Kid, the quickest draw in the west!



Sam got on his horse and rode into the sunset, never to be seen again.

GRADE 5 - SHORT STORY

Overnight In The School

"I really don't care at all !" replied Ashley Hardy in her snobby sing-songy voice.

"Really I don't !"

" Well then,.... then, I hate you, you big jerk !" growled Lindsey fiercely.

Their friends watched in tiresome silence as they threw more crude remarks to each other. Ashley and Lindsey had been fighting now for 5 years, every since they were in Kindergarten. It all started on that first day when there was a battle about a yellow crayon, and now they are 10 years old and still at it. No doubt about it, their friends were getting sick of it!

That day at lunch Lindsey started bragging about staying all night in the school!

"Sure, right, yeah, uh huh!" were only some of the replies she was getting. Just as she was beginning to get incredibly mad... A daresome boy looked up and said, "I DARE YOU!"

Now Lindsey Jackson was not one to chicken out of a dare, so ever so sinisterly she replied, " I Accept !"

Of course everything can't always go perfectly in people's plans, and of course like all things, this one didn't go perfect either. What Lindsey didn't know was that her all time opponet, Ashley Hardy was overhearing every word of her conversation. She decided that she would just have to stay too, and make sure that Lindsey stayed, and kept her promise.

The day seemed to drag along ever so slowly, 3:05 seemed to take days not hours. Lindsey crouched into her position, little did she know Ashley was very close. They waited until 4:00 for the teachers to file out slowly. The janitors remained until 4:30. The girls found themselves getting impatient, but soon they found themselves, after the very last light switched off, and the very last door closed, alone in the school building.

As Lindsey realized what was going on, she jumped up, and let out a big yell,

"Oh, yes!"

Ashley yelled, "Just be quiet you little show off!"

"Hey what are you doing here?" asked Lindsey.

"Exactly the question I was going to ask you!" replied Ashley.

"Well, don't think you can come to me whining when you get scared!" Lindsey insisted.

"Well, just don't worry Miss Lindsey! Don't you worry!"

Meanwhile, Lindsey ventured into the usual busy but now still hallway. She decided to do something she always wanted to do. She took a deep breath as she approached the boys bathroom.

"I'll just show her," Ashley thought to herself flipping the television to MTV. Hmm! Imagine me getting scared, and running to her. The NERVE!

"How disgusting!" Lindsey thought to herself as she exited the boy's bathroom. It wasn't nearly as exciting as she had planned and it had a horrible odor.

Ashley was beginning to have a horrible headache from listening to Alanis Morissette, a famous rap singer, bang out tunes. About that time, she heard it, a horrible bolt of lightning and thunder. Ashley jumped and apparently Lindsey heard it too. The lights blinked. Oh no, this wasn't suppose to happen. Then the lights went off and stayed out.

Ashley remembered seeing flashlights in the Teachers Lounge for emergency use. This was definitely an emergency! She made her way slowly and carefully to the teacher's lounge but her heart was sprinting to get some relief.

Lindsey on the other hand, wandered around the dark school. "Oh!" she thought, "what was that noise? Nothing, right? Of course... why, what could be in this school building this late?"

Ashley didn't know where she was going, but she wished she wasn't there at this moment. She felt something brush against her leg. "Oh!" she shrieked. It was only a fern bush. Wow, what a relief.

Lindsey heard the scream, too. She looked behind her and started to tiptoe down the hall. Although she'd never admit, she was scared stiff. Ashley was beginning to get panicky. She looked behind her, and broke into a run. BOOM! The two girls collided into each other going at full speed. "You klutz!" said Lindsey.

"Well, you're one too!" replied Ashley.

"Ok, Ok, I am starving, I need something to eat!" "Do you know where anything to eat is?" pleaded Lindsey.

"Well, even if I did why would I tell you?" boasted Ashley.

"Please, pretty please." begged Lindsey.

"Okay, in the Teachers Lounge!" confessed Ashley.

They raced to the Teachers Lounge. Lindsey got there just before Ashley did, and made her way to the refrigerator to find that it was totally empty except a bologna sandwich, a pack of ketchup, and the remainders of a Slim Fast.

"Uh, I'm going to barf!" hollered Ashley.

"Really, there is nothing in the refrigerator!" yelled Lindsey.

"Ditto for the cabinets!" replied Ashley.

"Great, all we have is old bologna, old tuna fish and crackers, a pack of ketchup, and the remainders of a Slim Fast."

"Our special for tonight is, very old bologna, and tuna fish with stale crackers on the side." mimicked Ashley.

"Check please!" ordered Lindsey.

Just as the girls were beginning to enjoy themselves, they heard something.

CREAKkkkk!

"What was that?" questioned Ashley.

"It was just the wind or something, right?" replied Lindsey.

CREAKkkkk! BOOMmmm!

"That, that wasn't the wind" Ashley said getting hoarse.

"Uh,Uh!" assured Lindsey.

CREAKkkk! BOOMmmm! BANGggg!

"Run!" screamed Ashley.

They ran to the front door, and stared out into the dark and creepy schoolyard.

There in the moonlight appeared a figure. The moon reflected behind the creature so only the shape could be seen.

"Is it a burglar?" Lindsey thought to herself.

"Could it be Freddy Crooger?" Ashley thought remembering the gruesome movie

"Nightmare On Elm Street." Ashley shivered and hoped it wasn't.

The creature was carrying a cane, and wearing a ragged trench coat. Smoke came from it's lips, and it had only one big red eye. Ashley was sure she saw a piece of it fall to the ground.

"OOooh!" she shuddered her spine tickling from fright.

The girls slowly backed away from the door, then turned and sprinted to the girls bathroom. They stopped to catch their breath.

BOOMmmm! BANGggg! CRASHhhh! CLANKkkk! CREAKkkk!

"Wh-What was that?" questioned Ashley.

"I don't know, but it's getting closer!" Lindsey replied.

"Eek!" shrieked Ashley.

The outside door to the bathroom creaked.

"Yipes!" yelled Lindsey.

There at their own feet stood the... The Janitor??

"Hey, what are you doing in here?" he asked.

"Um,er, well, we, uh, kinda, sorta, had, well, you know a problem that, we, kind of!" stuttered Ashley.

"Well, spit it out, you little brats, you're wasting my time, I came to check the back door,

and here you are!" the janitor snapped.

"We were planning on staying all night in the school!" Lindsey said much cooler then she really felt.

"We're really sorry, and we'll leave right now if you want us to," apologized Ashley.

"Really we will!" put in Lindsey.

"Nope, nobody's going anywhere until I get some names!" the Janitor insisted.

"Oh, our names are..." led on Ashley.

And at that moment Lindsey had a great idea. "We, err...." she stuttered coming closer to the open door. As she grabbed Ashley's hand, they dunked between the janitor's legs.

"Hey, get back here!" he commanded.

"Ha, Ha, you'll never get our names now!" Lindsey yelled.

On the way home Lindsey broke the silence by saying, "You know Ashley that was really great, about you knowing where the flashlights and food was."

"Not even half as good as when you had the idea of escaping through the janitor's legs!" Ashley insisted.

"Well, I suppose we both did pretty well," Lindsey replied.

"Friends?" Ashley proposed.

"Friends!" answered Lindsey.

"Hey, it's too bad we really didn't get to stay all night in the school!" Ashley said.

"Don't worry about it; I'm planning on hitting the library next!"

Ashley felt stunned whoa! "Look up," she called. The sun had risen.

"Bye Ashley!"

"Bye!" Lindsey called back.

Ashley walked in her house, "How was Monica's?" Ashley's mother called.

"Great!" she stuttered.

"I called!" her Mother said.

Ashley's eyes went wide.....

THE HAUNTED CHRISTMAS TREE

It was a cold blustery night, every child on Side-street was supposed to be in bed. Most were asleep dreaming of the toys that would await them in the morning. In the Keeps house hold 7 year-old Mary and 4 year-old Sara Keeps are wide awake when everyone else is asleep (or so they thought).

"Mary, button my nightgown," Sara asked frustrated.

"Sara you've ripped the top button. Wait here, I'm going to get a safety pin to close the hole," Mary answered, gently chuckling as she walked down the hall to the bathroom.

Sara sat down on the edge of her bed, grabbed her pillow, and snuggled her face into the soft, flannel, pillow case and surprisingly went to sleep.

When Mary returned she noticed that Sara had fallen asleep. She gently laid Sara down, tucked her in tight, and softly kissed her forehead. Mary walked over to her bed on the other side of the room and laid down. She turned off the lamp on her night stand beside her bed and then realized that the lamp on her sisters little pink painted night stand was burning dimly. Mary got up once more, went over to Sara's bed and turned the carousel lamp off. A few hours later...

"Mary," Sara said, "Mary did you hear that."

"Hear what," replied Mary.

"That noise it sounded like it came from the living room. I hope the Christmas tree is still there," said Sara in a scared voice.

"Don't worry, at least it was when I went to the bathroom about 10 minutes ago. Besides it's so big you would have to take it down to get it out the door," Mary reassured Sara.

"Maybe you heard Santa, let's go to sleep fast. If he knows we are awake he might take our presents back," Mary used as an excuse to get Sara to go to sleep.

Without a word Sara ran to her bed and laid down and went to sleep with a smile on her face. Mary walked over to her bed and laid down too, but did not go to sleep. She laid on her side facing Sara and tried her best to listen for any unusual noises before she drifted off to sleep herself.

Later that night, Sara was awakened again by the same noise she had heard earlier.

"Mary, wake up, Mary," Sara said in a quiet yet threatening voice. "Are you awake!, Did you hear it!, Are you awake!"

"I am now," replied Mary in a harsh but quiet tone, as she tried to get her eyes open.

"You don't sound like you are," Sara said giving her a *I-don't-think-so* look.

"I am, okay. Now what do you want," Mary demanded.

"I heard that noise again, please go look. I'll go with you if you will, please," Sara pleaded.

"Okay, if you'll quit bothering me, I'll go. Get a flashlight." Mary said.

"Got it, let's go," said Sara excitedly

Slowly, they crept through the hall, trying to be as quite as possible so they wouldn't wake momma and poppa. They could see the angel on top of the Christmas tree from the hallway. The angel glowed in the darkness. It was holding a candle and had wings that moved as if it was flying. Ribbons were flowing down her dress like the small pink streamers at Sara's birthday party, but smaller. Mary and Sara could see more and more of the Christmas tree as they tiptoed slowly toward the living room.

Quietly Mary tugged at Sara's nightgown and started to whisper to her, but before she could say anything the tree started shaking. The ornaments were swinging back and forth and some fell to the floor and rolled by their feet. The floor rattled and shook

as the ornaments bounced tragically off the floor. The girls stood there with their mouths open and couldn't make a sound they were so scared. All at once Sara made a dash back toward the bedroom and Mary followed on her heels.

When they reached their room and had the door locked, Mary said. "What in the world is going on."

Sara replied breathlessly, "I don't know but I'm not going back out there, Christmas or not."

Sara ran to her bed and buried herself under the covers. Mary stood by the locked door trying to figure out what could have happened. She wondered if she should wake momma and poppa but was afraid she would get in trouble for being up herself. After awhile she decided she would wait and see if anything else happened. Meanwhile Mary noticed Sara had fallen back asleep with her face red from where she had cried. Mary walked over to the dresser and grabbed a tissue from the candy cane decorated tissue box and wiped Sara's face. Then she sat on the end of her bed with her head in her hands listening. For what, she wasn't sure. Different things ran through her mind. Could it have been Santa, an earthquake or had someone broken into the house and stolen all the presents? The only way she would know was if she went back out there.

Mary decided that's what she would do, without Sara this time. She was a scardy cat anyway and would not be much help except for getting them both in trouble for waking momma. Very quietly Mary unlocked the bedroom door and listened. When she didn't hear anything she slowly started down the hallway toward the living room again. So far everything was still and quiet. The angel on the tree glistened in the moonlight but was still. The Christmas tree was just like it was supposed to be, sparkling and shining and all the presents were piled underneath. Mary stood thinking and quickly decided she would hide in the living room closet for awhile and see if anything happened. She slowly made her way to the closet, opened the door, slipped in and closed the

door quietly behind her. It sure was dark. Mary almost decided it wasn't a good idea after all but since she was there she might as well wait awhile. She tried to get comfortable among the coats and clutter in the closet.

All of sudden she heard noises again. Mary peeped through the door, got scared and closed it again. Mary had to settle herself down so she wouldn't run out screaming. After awhile she got enough courage to peep through the door again. The tree shook and rustled noisily but not as much as before. She slowly inched out of the closet, looked around and made her way to the tree. She saw a dark shadow between the lower branches of the tree as it slowly moved upward. By now she was more curious than scared. Mary quietly made her way to the tree and peered into the branches but before she could see what was there, she heard a cry from the bedroom. Sara awoke and called her name. Paying no attention to her, Mary took a deep breath for courage and parted the branches of the tree.

Two bright green eyes peered back at Mary.

"Chowder, is that you?" Mary said.

"All this time it's been you that's made the tree shake and the ornaments fall off." Mary said relieved.

She picked up Chowder and took her into the bedroom.

"Look Sara, here is our ghost of Christmas."

"Chowder," Sara cried.

It was only the family cat. Chowder was about a year old and full of mischief. She was light brown in color and not really a very pretty cat but we loved her just the same.

"That was you all this time." Sara took Chowder into her arms and kissed her on the top of her head. She took Chowder to her bed and sat her down. Mary sat down on the end of the bed. Chowder walked over to her and curled up on Mary's lap and went to sleep. Even though it was 7 am Sara laid down in her soft sheets and soundlessly went to sleep. Mary gently pushed Chowder off her lap and onto the end of the bed. Chowder didn't

pay any attention to the change, but went to sleep as if she was still in Mary's lap. Mary walked over to her bed laid down and drifted off to sleep once more.

GRADE 7 - SHORT STORY

"Revenge"

"Hey, Rusty," called Jacob Salisbury, the biggest bully in town, from across the street.

"Yeah?" answered Rusty as he exited the candy shop.

"Go check out your bike. See how you like it."

"What did you do to it, Jacob?"

"Oh, I just made a few adjustments. I know you'll like it. Ha-ha-ha!"

Rusty sprinted behind the candy shop where he had left his bike. He was devastated at what he saw. Jacob had slashed the tires so that they were now flat. On top of that he had turned the seat around backwards and taken the chain off. "Oh man! My parents are going to be furious."

The sad thing was that Rusty was completely defenseless, at least physically. Rusty was a genuine nerd. His muppy brown hair flopped into his eyes as he walked home, which was more than a mile away. Everyone who was not Rusty's friend picked on him, especially Jacob Salisbury.

At the time, Rusty was not thinking about this. He had his mind focused on how to gain revenge on Jacob.

"Rusty, where on earth have you been?" questioned Mrs. Felps, his mom, as he trudged into the kitchen.

"Walking home."

"But I thought you rode your bike...."

"Yeah, I did, but Jacob slashed my tires."

"He did what?" she yelled.

"He also turned the seat around and took the chain off."

When Rusty told her this, she grabbed him by the arm and went out to the garage. He showed her the damage and she was outraged.

"I gotta get Jacob back somehow," said Rusty quietly as he walked upstairs to his room. He sat down at his desk and began playing *Alien Invader III*, his new video game. After about two hours, Mr. Felps came up and made Rusty get in bed. He could not fall asleep, so he just lay there looking at his glow-in-the-dark map of the universe brainstorming ways to get Jacob back. He was going to get him good, really good. While sleeping, Rusty came up with a plan that would make Jacob miserable.

The next morning, Rusty took a shower and got ready for school. He stuffed a tube of superglue into his pocket as he walked out the door. He left earlier than usual to make sure that Jacob would not be there when he arrived.

"Hi, Mr. Slack," said Rusty cheerfully as he passed the principal in the hall. There were very few other students around, which was to his advantage. Rusty walked straight to Mrs. Turner's class and she was not there, so he had the room all to himself. He found the desk where Jacob sat and pulled out the chair. Then, he smeared superglue all over his seat. It was clear, and hardly noticeable. After doing this, Rusty went and sat down at his own desk.

Jacob was the last person to enter the room. When he did, Rusty started sweating and his glasses slid down his nose. Rusty

was relieved when Jacob sat down, not noticing the glue. The bell rang a few moments later and class was in session.

"Class, the first thing we are going to do today is grammar, so get out your grammar books," said Mrs. Turner, "Yes, Jacob, what is it?"

"Umm... I left my grammar book in my locker. May I go and get it?"

"Yes, but hurry back. Next time, bring it with you, okay?"

Jacob tried to get out of his seat, but he couldn't. His rear end was stuck. "Mrs. Turner," he pleaded, "I can't get up. I'm stuck."

"Oh stop being silly, of course you can."

"But..."

"Jacob if you do not want to receive a zero for today's daily grade, I suggest that you get out of your seat and go to your locker."

"I can't get up. Come over here and have a look for yourself."

Sure enough, Mrs. Turner saw that Jacob was superglued to his chair. By this time, a few of the students were giggling.

"Well, I suppose you will have to take your pants off in order to get loose," said Mrs. Turner.

"What?" exclaimed Jacob.

"I don't know anything else that we can do. If you do, I'd be happy to let you try it."

Unwillingly, Jacob did as he was told. The class broke out into a roar of laughter, especially Rusty. Jacob turned as red as a strawberry. He ran to the office in his boxer shorts and called his mom to come pick him up.

Rusty was very pleased with himself. Rather than using strength, Rusty relied on his brain to gain revenge on Jacob. He had a feeling that Jacob would not be bothering him anymore.

In Honor of James

The sun shone down onto the white, churning waters of the Colorado River with the intensity of a laser beam. Every rock below the surface of the water produced a tremendous amount of bubbles. Looking downstream the entire surface of the water seemed to be one large layer of bubbles. This was the might of the Colorado River. This was what brought hundreds of insane, adventure craving extremists to the river each year.

Mark Johnson stood on a large boulder, projecting out into the raging waters, staring at the river he had left so long ago with a saddened heart. His attention was turned toward two large, jagged rocks sticking up in the middle of the rapids. The bright green paint from his friend James's kayak was still there. Leaving a grim reminder of the raw power of the river.

Everything was different from the last time that Mark was here. Mark, who had once been just like those others, craving adventure, was on a much more solemn trip this time. On his first trip Mark had come to simply experience the rush of adrenaline that came with risking his life. Now, Mark was on a mission to complete a trip in memory of his fallen friend. He was looking at each rock, no matter how small, as though his life depended on it. Mark could not take a chance on dragging the bottom of his kayak on a rock that he did not know about.

Gradually, Mark's mind began to drift back to that tragic day. Even now, five years later, Mark's eyes began to fill with tears. That day had been much like this day. Early that morning Mark and James had decided to attempt to "run" the most dangerous part of the river; to attempt to prevail over the untamed river, and to make fun of their friends that had "chickened out". Everything was going perfect until James tried to paddle around two large rocks in the middle of the river. In the blink of an eye, he was swept into one of the large rocks, instantly crushing his kayak into a million pieces. Slowly, James's lifeless body slipped below the surface of the water. Mark, who had been watching in terror from his kayak on the other side of the river also hit a rock, but with less force. His kayak was also destroyed, but Mark remained conscious. As he struggled to pull himself up onto the rock he felt an excruciating pain in his right leg. The pain surged all the way up the side of his body. It began as a dull throb, as it moved up his body it became an intense stabbing pain. For an instant, Mark thought that his kayak paddle had gone through his leg, but he quickly realized that that wasn't the case at all. Partly, because he was still holding the paddle in his hand.

With much agony he pulled himself up onto the rock. He looked downstream to see if James had surfaced yet, but all that he saw were the splintered remains of James's kayak

being washed downstream. Just as the image had appeared, in Mark's mind, it disappeared.

Mark had been lucky so many years ago; he had only suffered a broken leg. A leg that had bothered him since then. His friend James, however, had not been so lucky. He died on that trip. A trip that Mark was now going to complete to honor James's memory.

As Mark walked along the riverbank he felt something that he hadn't felt since his childhood. He felt fear. "Do you really want to do this?" Mark asked himself. It was a question that he had been asking himself since he first thought of completing the trip. It had taken him three years to gather enough courage to make the trip, but now the courage was gone and all that Mark felt was apprehension. He stood motionless for a couple of minutes; thinking whether or not he should even go forward with the whole, insane idea. His friend, a much more experienced rafter, had died on this river, and now Mark was going to try to "run" the river himself.

Mark closed his eyes, trying to make the fear go away; but instead, he saw the image of James's lifeless body slipping below the surface of the water. Then, after opening his eyes, he felt a small feeling of confidence emerge from deep within himself. It was almost as though James was there with him. Telling him to go on with the trip, to defeat the river, survive, and put the haunting

memories behind him. With that small feeling, Mark started walking toward his kayak.

For the first time in almost five years Mark would be riding in a kayak. Because of his inactivity in the sport Mark knew that his mission would become that much more difficult. So Mark was willing to use anything that might help increase his chances of surviving the rapids. One advantage that Mark had was his unrelenting determination to succeed. Another "special advantage" that Mark had was his kayak.

Mark's kayak was a Duablo XR II Special. Its seven foot long body made it very maneuverable and stable. Its oval shape, that came to a point at each end, made quick turns easier. It was also painted a bright red to make spotting it easier if it should capsize. Its seat was specially designed to fit Mark's figure to ensure he would remain comfortable during the ride.

As Mark stepped into his kayak and sat down he felt that old familiar rush of excitement overwhelm him. The feeling was quickly replaced with a feeling of utmost concentration. For if Mark lost his concentration for only a half second, the water would carry him into a rock; crushing his kayak, and leaving him to suffer the same fate as James.

Mark carefully paddled out into the middle of the river. Almost immediately, he felt the current "grab hold" of his kayak. He paddled fiercely, maneuvering his kayak

around rock after rock. Soon Mark was totally exhausted, but he dared not stop paddling; if he did he would surely not make it through the rapids. For each rock that he made it around, two more seemed to appear just in front of him.

For a brief moment, Mark thought that it was hopeless. "There's too many rocks," he thought to himself, "I can never make it around all of them!" Then the image of James's lifeless body reappeared in his mind, making him more determined than ever. All the fear, all the doubt Mark channeled, using it to help him concentrate on the fast approaching rocks.

Suddenly, a wave of water splashed up and hit Mark in the face, knocking his goggles off, and blinding him for a few seconds. Mark quickly took one hand off the paddle, and began rubbing at his eyes. His vision was blurred and all that he saw was a collage of brown and white colors. A feeling of total desperation came over him. For an instant Mark thought that he would never see the light of day again, but then he came back to reality and realized that it was only water. As he blinked, trying to clear the water from his eyes Mark heard a sound similar to water running down a drain.

Once he regained his vision, all that Mark could see were the bubbles coming up from the rapids, gushing between two rocks. By the time he realized that he was headed for an "alley" between the two rocks it was too late to attempt to steer around them. He could only hope the space between

the two rocks would be wide enough for him to squeeze through.

As he came closer, Mark closed his eyes and held onto the paddle for dear life. He felt his stomach tighten and for an instant he thought of bailing out of his kayak. All Mark could think about was if this was how James had felt before he died.

Mark opened his eyes once again; this time the rocks were directly in front of him. He quickly closed his eyes and braced for the tremendous impact. In an instant it was over. Instead of feeling his kayak get caught between the two rocks it just continued along its path.

In amazement Mark turned back and looked. The water had caused him to misjudge the amount of space between the two rocks. Oddly enough, there was room for almost two kayaks.

As he continued to look at the rocks he realized that he had just made it past the place where James had died. "It must have looked the same way to James," Mark mumbled to himself, "except instead of trying to go between them; he had tried to negotiate around them. The current must have been so strong that it just carried him into the rock."

Mark then felt a strong sense of pride engulf him. He had made it past the place where James had died. "This one's for you James," he said softly, while paddling toward the bank. Tears once again filling his eyes.

As he neared the bank he could see a celebration erupting from his friends. As he ran onto shore he was overwhelmed with the feeling of the moment. What had began as a solemn trip to honor a fallen friend, had turned into a triumph of man over nature.

The celebration continued long into the night. Each person, in their own way, paid tribute to the memory of James. The most touching, however, came from Mark himself. The kayak that he had used to conquer the river was turned into a monument on the side of the riverbank; so everyone would know that Mark had done this to honor James. A person that had loved the river, and taken his last breathe there. It would also warn everyone in the future of the extreme dangers of the river, and to hopefully keep others from suffering the same fate as James.

Love of Her Life

She had never been afraid of flying. In fact, as she looked out the window, she noticed how relaxing it was. To her, the world was small. The swimming pools were vague blue dots among a series of tiny brown boxes, which at any closer perspective, would have obviously been houses.

As she sat back in her seat, she thought about those suburban dream homes. "Dream homes?" she thought. "Who could dream of saving their entire lives to buy a house?" She never understood that. Then again, her dreams were different than most other people.

"Can I help you with anything?" She looked up and saw a flight attendant standing over her with a smile spread across her face.

"No thanks." The stewardess walked on, but, while leaning back in her seat, she continued to think about her. What kind of career is this? Traveling all over the country but never getting to see any of it. It's just like being a waitress in the sky.

She thought, "I wonder what her parents said when she told them she wanted to be a flight attendant." Then she stopped herself. Another thought crossed her mind and a lump built up in her throat. Of course, she probably hadn't chosen this profession. She was probably an aspiring something-actress, model, stuntwoman—you name it. But here she was, flashing her pearly smile at everyone, hoping, deep down, that one of these travelers would be the director who would give her the big break she wanted.

She had to immediately push that thought out of her head. "No" she told herself. "That's not me." But what if it was? Every day of her life, since she was born, the scenario had run through her head. "The day I graduate college," she used to say, "I'm getting on a plane, going to LA, and staying there until I make something of my life." That's what nobody could ever understand. She was a smart girl, so how could she be so stupid?

"Miss," a voice brought her back down to earth.

"Huh?" She looked around, trying to figure out who was talking to her. A man was leaning across the aisle smiling at her.

"Is that your life?"

"What?" Suddenly she felt confused, maybe even a little defensive. "What is he trying to say? That I'm wasting my time on this flight? That even though I'm traveling thousands of miles I'm not really getting anywhere?"

"Is that your Life Magazine?" he asked, somewhat stunned at her change of composure.

"Oh yeah, sorry." She handed him the magazine and thought to herself, "What was that?" she wondered "Maybe I'm just scared, but that was out there."

"Maybe you're losing it." She could almost hear her best friend's voice in the back of her head. "Hope, you're so crazy sometimes." That was one of her favorite things about her friend, she always kept her in line. They sometimes argued, but it never lasted long and never got in the way of their fun times.

She let out a sigh. That was over. When they had started college they hadn't done things nearly as much. But now it was really over. All those stupid, meaningless things that mean so much. Fighting back tears for the hundredth time that day, she had to tell herself it would be all right.

She decided to count. How many times did she want to cry that day? When she woke up in the middle of the night, this morning when she hit the snooze button, when she hit it again, and again. When she got in the shower, when she packed the rest of her things, when she poured herself a glass of orange juice, and, of course, when she called her boyfriend.

She knew they would be okay, if nothing else would be. But the minute she heard his voice, her eyes welled up with tears and she couldn't control her emotions. He told her that all those miles didn't mean a thing and wasn't strong enough to tear them apart. If he was trying to help it didn't work because at that point she was sobbing uncontrollably.

She sniffled once more. Then, trying to forget about that morning, she slowly turned to look around the plane. For the first time, she realized who was making this journey with her. Well, not exactly her journey, but their own. A young mother with twins was sitting near the front. How had she

not heard their screeching before? They were running around, gradually turning their mother's hair gray. She couldn't have been more than thirty. "Poor thing," she thought.

She then looked across the aisle, once again to the man who had talked to her earlier. He was leaning over a laptop. You could almost sense an ulcer forming. His forehead was scrunched and his eyes were squinted, trying to read the tiny screen. Once again she felt extreme pity. He was so young, but his wrinkles were already deep and a bald spot was appearing on the back of his head.

She then peeked around to the back of the plane. A young couple was sitting there, gazing into each other's eyes. But it wasn't that sweet, romance novel sort of gazing; it was that get-a-room-or-make-me-gag sort of gazing. The saddest thing, they weren't more than eighteen. It almost pained her to see them as one of the statistic marriages that didn't last. Or if it did, one of those miserable marriages that people never wanted to be around. "That's it", she told herself, "I can't watch this anymore."

She turned back around. All these people, their lives were already mapped out. Their dreams have had their chances and now it was too late. She had to quit doing that. She always put down other people's goals. For some reason, she felt her goals were above all that. Like she was the ultimate dreamer. Someday, she decided, she would have to learn to respect that in people.

"Ladies and gentlemen", the captain's voice came over the intercom; "We would ask you to please fasten your seatbelts as we are experiencing some minor turbulence." "Great," she thought, "just what I need." She decided to close her eyes. She just needed to block everything out. The couple making out in the back, the young mother, scrambling to get her kids in their seats, and the man across the aisle, stressed to save whatever precious work he had been working on.

She tried to focus on the big picture. "I'm finally going." She thought back on everything. Not just that day, but her life. From the day she first smiled that little smile and got all the attention she wanted, she knew she was destined for the stage. By the time she had started school she already knew what she had to do. It was cute then because every little blonde hair girl wanted to be a singer or a model or president, something like that.

Then, when she reached middle school, it wasn't quite as cute anymore. At career fairs people gave her funny looks when they asked what she wanted to be and she said "famous." People thought she was immature. "You'll see," all those people would say, "Life doesn't work that way." That didn't stop her. Every time she did a small community theater play, or every time she made a speech to her classmates, she was reassured. This was the only thing that would make her happy.

Then she reached high school. She continued to pursue acting, and her family and friends were always supportive, but she could see beyond that. Deep down people were rolling their eyes, laughing at her, or, worst of all, feeling pity for her. "Waitress," they thought. "That's where the poor girl will end up. She'll be living back at home by the time she's thirty." She wasn't stupid, though. She got a degree in business, something she'd always planned on to fall back on.

So now, here she was. All of those years of dreaming and planning and here she was. "It all came too fast." It was a wonder she had even boarded the plane that morning. Her parents, who always believed in her dreams, even respected her for them, knew she was making a mistake. At a final attempt to get her to stay, her mother had basically told her she wouldn't make it.

"This is a waste of money, Hope. You'll regret leaving." Tears had come to her eyes again, and, standing in the airport terminal, she had turned to board the plane. She then stopped, turned around, and looked at her parents.

"I might regret this tomorrow. I might even regret this as soon as the plane takes off. But when I'm eighty, I'll know I tried." And with that she boarded the plane. That was it. Looking back now it seemed overly dramatic, but maybe that's just the way it needed to be.

A sudden jolt brought her back down to earth. Then, another jolt knocked her magazines out of the seat next to her. She could hear the children screeching in the front of the plane. Turning around, she realized even the stewardesses had sat down to fasten themselves in. "That's not a good sign," she thought. This day's not getting any better.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we've entered an extreme storm front. Please be patient while we try to get through this." Fear hit her like a brick. Maybe it was because of her already weak emotional state, or maybe it was the killer headache the screaming and jolting had brought on, but she started to cry. She

felt helpless to stop it so she allowed the tears to continue flowing. Passengers around her seemed concerned but they were too busy being scared to comfort her.

Suddenly, the plane tossed forward and bags started falling from the overhead compartments. A woman screamed and she realized that a bag had hit her in the head. Grasping the armrest, she found her mind spinning and the whole world turning.

Her tear flow quickly turned into a panic attack. Barely able to breathe, her mind raced with fear. Not only were her friends, family, and parents working against her, but now fate decided that Hollywood was not where she belonged. This troubled her more than anything. "It's not meant to be", she thought. Closing her eyes again, she passed out. She hadn't even realized how bad she was hyperventilating.

* * *

"Miss?" Hope slowly opened her eyes. The plane was empty. "Did we wreck?" She wondered. "No, the everything's still intact."

"Miss?"

"Oh, sorry."

"Are you alright?"

"Yes of course." The flight attendant walked away and she slowly raised herself out of her seat. She bent over to pick the magazines up off the floor. Then, gathering her things she carefully walked off the plane. She sat down in a seat by a window. Having been anxious to get off the plane, she needed to sit down. What was she going to do?

"To stay or to go," she thought. This was it. Boarding the plane was easy; she had been proving a point. But this was the big test. Was she ready to go for her dreams? Would she rather try and fail, or did she forever want to wonder what would happen.

She closed her eyes again, trying to see the big picture. Then a thought came to her. This one decision is the one that will effect me forever. This one tiny decision will determine the rest of my life. If I get back on a plane, I know I'll never be able to try this again. My whole life can change in this minute.

Without stopping to think, she quickly stood up, gathered her things, and headed to the luggage rack. After getting her things, she found her way outside the airport and hailed a cab. She knew where she was going, almost instinctively. Her mind raced but this time it was good. All her life was waiting for this moment. A few minutes later the cab stopped in a small, well-built subdivision. She thanked the driver and paid him. Then, standing there alone on the street, she gazed at the view. Far across fields, on top of a mountain, stood something that she'd always dreamt of seeing.

Perched there, overlooking the stars, was the one beacon to all dreamers like her. She slowly read the sign, even though she already knew what it said. The word HOLLYWOOD almost stared back at her as she realized, "Here I am, and I'm happy."

The Art of True Observation

I awake in the middle of a cold winter night. My eyelids spasm and flutter, a prelude to their opening, and I squint as neon street lights attack unfocused pupils. All remnants of a dream--vivid only minutes ago--are shattered into a thousand pieces, spread throughout the realms of my consciousness. Now the real world surrounds me, harsh in comparison.

I describe this event in detail because it is not only a literal awakening; but a spiritual one as well. And the story began two weeks ago as my friends and I were walking home from school. Quilted leather and fur coats warmed our bodies as the crisp, cold air assaulted our faces. My friends Jameela, Sarah, Eric, and Kaleel and I had taken the same route home everyday since the first day of Junior High, two years ago.

I'll never know what it was that influenced me to persuade my friends to try a short-cut on this particular day. Perhaps it was the icy air nipping at my nose and ears, urging me home in a hurry. Maybe it was a craving for adventure. Of course, these are only the more practical answers I have come up with since that cold, eventful day. I'd like to think, however, that someone or something was trying to awaken me from a rather dream-like awareness of life.

My friends and I lived in a beautiful neighborhood. Grand houses stood three and four stories high, each house adorned with at least two cars per driveway. Lawns were green practically year-round. Flower beds were kept up by hired gardeners, and trees were clipped when needed. Some homeowners held professions in the

medical field or in the field of law, while some were the lucky heirs of wealthy parents with large trust funds set aside especially for them. But there was one thing in particular that my friends and I shared in common; we had not yet mastered the art of true observation.

The only familiarity with poverty and homelessness my friends and I had were through movie and television portrayals. The characters were usually shabbily dressed with scraggly hair, dirty hands and rotten teeth. Often, they were depicted as shiftless, or too emotionally unstable to work. Other films showed them with signs which read, "Will Work for Food".

But we got a closer look at the homeless on our short-cut home that afternoon -- a view we'd never seen before. Whole families lined up along the sides of abandoned houses that the City had boarded up with "No Trespassing" signs until they could be renovated. The families huddled together, to warm each other with their own body heat. Eyes devoid of emotion scanned over us as we passed, and the stares burned into the flesh of our backs as we trudged further into the crowd.

The old man we passed was the first to speak to us. "Can you spare some change?", he asked us, looking at Eric. Just as I was about to dig into the pocket of my jeans, Kaleel began to laugh as Eric slid an empty gum wrapper into the old man's hands. At first, the man's eyes twinkled and he was pleased, but as he examined the wrapper, a hurt expression replaced his smile and you could see the muscles in his face tense. Then Kaleel began to jump at him in a

threatening manner, as if he were about to hit him. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

The rest of my friends seemed to be having the times of their lives. The now terrified expression on the man's face pierced my heart. I silently rejoiced upon hearing the screams of protest, until I realized that they were coming from me -- and someone else. I looked behind me, and there she stood.

The source of the most authoritative protests seemed oddly familiar. She looked to be about my age if not older. She had long hair, but it was pulled back into a ponytail. She stood with her hands on her hips, a set expression contorting her face. The feature that seemed most familiar to me was her eyes, and I froze in place staring at them while my friends scampered away in laughter.

Her eyes were almost golden, with specks of brown that seemed to be hiding. I knew I'd seen those eyes before, but I couldn't remember where. I stood there trying to recall, but after about three seconds, I was jolted into awareness by the sound of my own name. "Becka, Becka!," my friends called from a block away. I ran to catch up with them, but I could feel those golden eyes baring into my soul.

I felt I'd known the golden-eyed girls with shining brown hair from somewhere, but I just couldn't remember how we'd met. If I'd once associated with her, then how could she be homeless now? Had I seen her on television--the news--newspapers? No, I'd once known her very well, I thought. Was she a cousin or relative? I tossed

and I turned that night at bed time, determined to keep my eyes open until I'd solved the mystery. These questions must have been running through my mind as I dosed off.

When I opened my eyes near dawn, no longer was I lying in my own bed. I looked to my left and saw no triple dresser. I turned to my right, but I didn't see my cat sleeping soundly the plush red velvet chair. Instead, I saw a brick wall on either side of me, covered with sleeping people. Where was I? It was the exact scene I'd observed the other day. Empty bottles and cans cluttered the alley. Heaps of meager belongings sat bundled in boxes next to their owners. Little babies nestled in their mother's arms, shivering in spurts of fitful sleep. Only the golden-eyed girl was awake.

"Did the cold wake you, too?" she inquired.

"Yes," I lied. I hadn't really noticed the cold until she mentioned it. Now it's icy fingers seeped into my pores, making my bones ache. I sat upright and pulled my knees close to my chest for warmth, all the while trying to figure out how I came to be surrounded by the same people I'd seen only yesterday. *Where was my house? Where was my family?*

I felt the girl's eyes on me again, but when I stole a glance in her direction, she looked away. In my confusion, the occurrences of the previous day came flooding back. If my friends were with me then, where were they now? Had I been kidnapped from my home as cruel revenge for the elderly man's humiliation? Was this my punishment for accepting my friend's inhuman deed?

As if she'd read my mind, she pointed to my box of belongings. Inside were my favorite pair of gloves from last Christmas, and a box of tissues. It was apparent I'd been here for longer than a few minutes.

"Where are my parents?" I asked frantically, pulling on red knit gloves with furry cuffs.

"You would know better than I would," she replied coolly.

Hysterically, I spoke quickly in short sentences, trying to explain my predicament. I told her about the changes I'd faced in such a short period of time. I told her of my missing parents and friends. Her response surprised me.

"We are all in this together. It doesn't matter how we got here, just be glad you're somewhere with people who care," she said, as if she hadn't heard a word I'd said.

"How can you care for what you don't know?" I pondered, trying not to rouse her anger. "You people don't know me. I'm not one of you. I once lived in a four-story house and went to Junior High with all of my close friends. I've never slept in an alley before, and I don't intend to ever again, once I get this thing settled." I never meant for my words to come out that harsh.

"Do you think we didn't have lives before this? Everyone is just an accident away from being in our predicament. My parents were wealthy, too. We lived in a house right around the corner from those houses over there," she said, pointing to the neighborhood that was once mine.

The vague memories I'd scanned only yesterday returned fresh

and clear in my mind now. I remembered those golden eyes on a face from my fifth grade class. Those eyes always seemed to stare intently at the person being addressed, as if the message she was speaking with her lips could be reflected in the golden pools of her clear eyes. Suddenly, I remembered that her name was Rachel, and that she'd always wanted to be a lawyer. I realized she had not always been homeless and that, in fact, I'd spent many afternoons in the front yard of her house, just around the corner. Until yesterday -- actually, until just at that moment, I hadn't seen her since the last day of fifth grade.

Her voice interrupted my thoughts.

". . . The first thing people need to do is to open their eyes. When we open our eyes and examine the problem, we'll be able to solve it. If our eyes remain closed to the things we don't care about, how will we know what needs to be done to make things right? Just open your eyes and see. . . ."

Rachel's words reverberated through my head and I listened to them over and over. They began to make sense to me. *Open your eyes and see . . . open your eyes and see . . . open your eyes and see. . . .*, a voice seemed to be saying in the far corners of my mind.

I could still hear the words when I awoke, staring at the ceiling of my very own room. I looked to my left, and there sat my dresser. I looked to my right to find my cat, Lucky, purring intently, apparently enjoying the last minutes of his own dream. I stirred gently, just to reassure myself that the heated water bed

had not been transformed into the cold pavement of just minutes earlier. It had not.

Since that morning, I've tried very hard to figure out exactly what the experience--the short-cut, the dream--meant. Was it a dream at all, or was it real? Every time I pass through that alley to share blankets and warm clothes with people, Rachel and I exchange knowing glances. When my old friends ridicule me because of my new relationships with those less fortunate, I sometimes catch Rachel staring at me intently, as if trying to send me a mental message: *They just haven't mastered the art of true observation.*

Have you?

Mirrors

There exists a fine line between what we know and recognize as reality and what is truly real. The true horrors of the world are filtered through our logical minds, and that which we do not perceive as reality is usually vanquished from our memory. We were given this mechanism to preserve the sanity of our feeble brains, but all mechanisms are prone to failure sometime. Indeed, my mechanism has failed.

Recently I have been in a horrid financial condition. My accounts are completely empty, and my wallet is also running dry. I was forced to take the best offer I could for a living space. That offer came to me in the form of this accursed house. I had no choice, but I regret it nonetheless.

I probably should have suspected some foul presence when the previous owner sold this house to me for almost nothing. He had been eager to leave, having some strange fear of the house and its many rooms. Indeed, the rooms were strange. Each chamber was adorned with at least one, huge mirror that was built into the very wall. This fact had intrigued me at first, but now I realize that these mirrors are what seem to be causing my delirium. I have yet to overcome the intense madness that infects my brain at this moment, but I will do my best to explain.

My first few days in this hellish abode were actually quite peaceful. My sleeps were unbroken, my meals were quiet, and my studies went without interruption. This was before I started seeing the visions in the mirror. They came to me only sporadically at first, nothing more than a mere sound or a fleeting glance. I disregarded them as mere imagination. Soon, however, they grew more and more intense, as if they were building up to something completely horrible.

I remember one night when I was trying to get to sleep. My day had consisted of a

rigorous job search that had lead me to absolutely nowhere. I was lying in my bed, wondering where I should go during the next day, and my thoughts were intruded upon by a faint noise.

Any person should note that the house gets unnaturally silent during the night. The age old walls had the uncanny ability to imprison any sound wherever it may lurk. It did this very well. That is why I was disturbed at first by the noise, which, in itself, was quiet but audible. Time seemed to allow this sound to grow louder, as I could soon distinctly pick out the giggling of a small child followed by the noise of a bouncing ball. The idea passed through my mind that some child might be playing outside, and I soon got to sleep.

The sound had continued, however, each night afterwards for a week. I began to wonder what type of parents would let their child out at the hours of the night at which this young one played. My question was answered one night, when I faintly heard the anguished cries of a young mother calling for her son.

"Andrew! Andrew!" was what she yelled. "Andrew, get in here, the dog's gotten loose! Andrew!"

I remember hearing the child's giggle once again along with the constant bouncing of the ball. I remember the mother calling again to her child. I remember hearing the noise of the ball grow louder and louder until it seemed that it was nearly inside my room. As the sound grew increasingly louder, a realization startled me. The ball was bouncing *against* my bedroom door.

"Andrew!" the mother called again.

Again, the child giggled with delight. I distinctly heard the scuffle of footsteps in the hallway outside my room.

"Andrew!" the mother's shout was stern this time, and very near. "Andrew come here at

once!" She also seemed to be in the hall.

"No, mamma!" was the child's whining reply.

I heard the mother take a few striding footsteps until she reached her child. "Andrew, you're coming with me right now!"

The child started to wail. I could hear his anguished cries as his mother cut short his bouncing game. The two seemed to get into a struggle as the child tried to break free from his mother's grasp. The noise grew to an unbearable level.

All this time I was lying in bed, listening to everything and wondering how these people got into my house. I quickly stepped out of bed to approach the family that seemed to be arguing just outside my bedroom. The intensity of the struggling child increased as his wail grew to enormous proportions. I immediately opened the door to face these people.

Silence. Emptiness. A single, rubber ball bounced at my feet.

The next day I searched the house very thoroughly for any signs of human entry. Nothing.

That night, I decided to stay up again to see if the phenomenon would recur. It did. I had closed the door to my room once again because the long, dark corridor made me uncomfortable. I soon heard the mother's cry for her child once more. This time, however, there was no giggling, no reply of any sort.

The mother's wails continued for many minutes, until I heard something once again outside my door. It was the child. He giggled slightly as he came scuffling down the hallway.

"Andrew! There you are!" I heard the mother cry. "I told you that the dog's gotten loose!" She, too, ran down the hall.

"He's got my ball, mamma, " said the child.

"Don't worry about that, dear," the mother comforted.

"I want my ball, mamma. Mamma, I want my ball!" the child began to whine.

Their conversation was joined by another sound, one that I clearly heard coming from inside my room. It was the bouncing of the ball. I looked over the side of my bed where I had put the rubber plaything. An icy chill ran down the core of my spine. The ball was bouncing in its place.

"See, mamma. I told you he has my ball!" the child wailed, causing the ball to bounce more rapidly.

Suddenly, I heard the doorknob to my room begin to turn. It rotated gradually as the child chanted, "I want my ball, mamma! I want my ball!"

The door suddenly flew open with a blast of cold air. In a fit of fear and panic, I reached for the lamp that lay on the table beside my bed. Again there was silence. Again there was emptiness. Even the ball had stopped bouncing. I looked again over the side of my bed at the demonic plaything. It was gone.

I spent the next night in the study, with all the lights on. My nerves were shaken and chilled at the experience of the previous night. The storm that raged outside didn't help to calm me any, either. I found myself pacing around the large room, wondering what I was going to do about the haunting apparitions. It was shortly after midnight when I heard it again.

Bounce, bounce, bounce . . .

My skin crawled as the bouncing grew closer. I sat down and faced the mirror, doing my

best to calm myself. Again I heard the giggling.

Bounce, bounce, bounce . . .

More giggling.

Bounce, bounce, bounce . . .

This time I heard another noise, one I hadn't heard before. It was the growl of a dog.

Bounce, bounce.

It stopped. No more bouncing. I heard the giggle once more, but close this time.

Fearfully, I glanced into the mirror. There, standing right behind me and staring at our reflections, stood a little boy. I was startled by this and I turned around. He wasn't there. Glancing back at the mirror, I saw that he was no longer there either, but I heard him bouncing his ball in the room next to me.

I soon heard the faint voice of Andrew's mother calling for him once more. "Andrew! How many times do I have to tell you? The dog's loose! Andrew!"

A short, quick snarl echoed from nearby.

Andrew responded with a loud giggle from the next room. The giggle, in turn, was answered by a deep, resonant growl.

"Andrew!" the mother screamed. "The dog!"

Andrew tried to giggle again, but it was cut short by a loud, snapping snarl. A shrill scream echoed through the house. It was followed by a vicious tearing sound, the sound of a dog attacking a little boy.

"Andrew!" the mother cried in terror and anguish.

"Mom . . ." was all that the little boy could muster.

I was, indeed, startled by the vicious sounds of the dog, so I immediately jumped out of my seat. As I was about to run into the next room, the lights went out. Lost in the utter darkness, I stumbled across the large study into an even darker hallway. By the time I made my way to where I had heard the horrid sounds, they had ceased.

I picked up one of the many flashlights that I had placed around the house in case of a storm blackout and switched it on. The beam of light merely served to cast an eerie glow on everything that it fell upon. I proceeded to walk down the hallway, when something hit my foot. I shined the light downward, to the floor near where the object had made contact. It was the ball.

As I stooped over to pick it up, I realized that it was totally covered with blood, *warm* blood, and it had come from the kitchen. Turning my light into the room, I scanned the area for anything. A pool of blood stood against the farthest wall. It was slowly growing in size as if the very mirrors themselves were bleeding.

I stepped back into the hallway, sickened by the sight. As I turned to go down the hall, my light passed over something that caught my eye. I shone the light again on the thing. There, at the end of the hallway standing *in* the mirror, stood the blackest, most vicious dog I had ever seen. Its teeth were red and smeared with blood, and it licked its jaws as its crimson eyes sized me up. My blood ran cold.

I watched in fear as the creature looked me over. I immediately turned and ran from the ghostly beast. I didn't need to look back to know that the beast was somehow following me through the mirrors, I could feel the force behind its evil eyes enough to make my soul shiver.

I turned from the hallway into another one of the many mirrored rooms. To my surprise and fear, the demonic animal was already there, ready to strike. In a fit of fear and panic, I

pitched the flashlight, with all my strength, into the mirror from where the dog stood. The beast gave out a yelp as the entire mirror shattered, and its pieces fell, clattering to the floor. Silence hung heavy throughout the house.

I stood in that room for a bit, trying to catch my breath. The lights came back on as swiftly and suddenly as they went out, and I sighed in relief at the illumination. I scanned the room for the horrid animal. There was no sign of it, not even blood.

My head hurt greatly as I climbed the stairs up to my room. Once there, I closed the door and collapsed onto my bed. This is where I now lay, staring up at the ceiling, gripping Andrew's bloody rubber ball. I seemed to have forgotten that I carried it.

It is apparently over now. At least, I hope it's over. My perception, no matter how unrestricted, cannot handle another series of events like those I've just recently experienced. My mind is in ruins, my sanity is shattered, and my soul is frozen from the terror. This, I hope, is the end.

But wait, what's that? It sounds like a faint scratching upon my bedroom door. Maybe it's Andrew. Maybe he wants his ball back . . . maybe . . .